

Theme: The imprecatory psalms cry out for God to act against the enemies of God and His people.

I. Intro: Tough Text – Why Teach It?

- A. Hermeneutics intro – Psalm 137!
- B. This is a tough text! Many opinions about it!
- C. Can't avoid issue (Psalm 109; 18:37-42)

II. Psalm 137: Remember Zion & Babylon!

- A. The basic structure of Psalm 137
 - 1. Lament over captivity (vv 1-4)
 - 2. Vow to remember Jerusalem (vv 5-6)
 - 3. Cry of imprecation (vv 7-9)
- B. Key words: remember, Jerusalem/Zion, Babylon
 - 1. Remember – vv 1, vv 6 (also forget – v 5)
 - 2. Jerusalem/Zion – vv 1, 3, 5, 6, 7
 - 3. Babylon – vv 1, 8 (also captors etc. vv 3, 3, 4)
 - 4. Remember Zion for good, Babylon for evil!
- C. The problem: imprecation in verses 7-9
 - 1. This is the real problem – kill infants?
 - 2. What about loving enemies, reconciliation?

- 3. How should a Christian view this Psalm?

III. Key Points to Understand Psalm 137

- A. The pain of evil (empathy)
 - 1. We are not able to understand their suffering
 - 2. Brueggemann quotes (75, 77)
 - 3. PD James quote
 - 4. Ps 137 is a call for empathy on our part
- B. The strong language of pain (intimacy)
 - 1. The language of real pain & suffering is strong
 - 2. Similar in effect to hyperbole (million times!)
 - 3. The psalmist is intimate & real in prayer
 - 4. Ps 137 is a call for real, intimate prayer by us
- C. The call for God to act (faith)
 - 1. Note the psalmist does not do these things
 - 2. Only God may revenge (Pr 24:29; Dt 32:35)
 - 3. Example of David – did not act against Saul
 - 4. Specific prophecies about Babylon (Jer 51:56)
 - a. Show same language in v 8 and Jer 51:56

- b. Terms used in judgment prophecies (Is 13:16-18)
 - c. God fulfill your word!
- 5. Ps 137 a call to faith on our part – God judges
- D. The struggle between God and Satan (zeal)
 - 1. Real issue - struggle between Zion & Babylon
 - 2. Represent God & His enemies
 - a. Note the struggle here (v 3)
 - b. Contrast throughout scripture
 - c. Rev 17-18 and 21
 - 3. Not personal vengeance but cosmic justice
 - 4. Ps 137 a call to zeal for God & righteousness
- E. The NT transformation (spiritual vision)
 - 1. Enemies not flesh and blood (Eph 6:12)
 - 2. Final judgment & justice in eternity
 - 3. We are called to spiritual imprecation
 - 4. We are called to pray for humans – not curse
 - 5. Ps 137 call for us to see stakes of real battle

- A. Embracing **empathy** for the suffering
- B. Embracing **intimacy** in prayer
- C. Embracing **faith** that God will act
- D. Embracing **zeal** for God and righteousness
- E. Embracing **spiritual vision** about the real battle

Imprecation: Avenge Your People O God!

Psalm 137

January 11, 2004

Response: Prayer based on Psalm 137

Benediction: Ps 121

IV. Embracing Psalm 137 Today

³⁷ I pursued my enemies and overtook them; I did not turn back till they were destroyed. ³⁸ I crushed them so that they could not rise; they fell beneath my feet. ³⁹ You armed me with strength for battle; you made my adversaries bow at my feet. ⁴⁰ You made my enemies turn their backs in flight, and I destroyed my foes. ⁴¹ They cried for help, but there was no one to save them-- to the LORD, but he did not answer. ⁴² I beat them as fine as dust borne on the wind; I poured them out like mud in the streets.
Ps 18:37-42

Such a statement might be an embarrassment to bourgeois folk who have never lost that much, been abused that much, or hoped that much. But such a statement is not embarrassing to those who have been marginalized long enough... It is hard for complacent bourgeois folk who have suffered little to understand the tenacity of affronted memory among the brutalized. Perhaps this psalm will be understood and valued among us only if we experience some concrete brutalization.
Walter Brueggeman, *The Message of the Psalms*, 75, 77

“If I had a God, I’d like Him to be intelligent, cheerful, and amusing.”
He said, “I doubt whether you’d find Him much of a comfort when they herded you into the gas chambers. You might prefer a God of vengeance.”
P.D. James, *Original Sin*, 232

²⁹ Do not say, "I'll do to him as he has done to me; I'll pay that man back for what he did." Proverbs 24:29

³⁵ It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them." Deuteronomy 32:35

A **destroyer** will come against Babylon; her warriors will be captured, and their bows will be broken. For the LORD is a God of **retribution**; he will **repay in full**. Jeremiah 51:56

O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to **destruction**, happy is he who **repays** you for **what you have done** to us Psalm 137:8

16 Their **infants** will be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses will be looted and their wives ravished. 17 See, I will stir up against them the Medes, who do not care for silver and have no delight in gold. 18 Their bows will strike down the young men; they will have no mercy on infants nor will they look with compassion on children. Isaiah 13:16-18

¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6:12

¹ By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. ² There on the poplars we hung our harps, ³ for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" ⁴ How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land? ⁵ If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget *its skill*. ⁶ May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy. ⁷ Remember, O LORD, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. "Tear it down," they cried, "tear it down to its foundations!" ⁸ O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us-- ⁹ he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.

Psalm 137:1-9

Lord, we sit in this sin dominated world, and we weep as we remember your good plans for our universe. Throughout many ages your people have suffered under the power of your enemies. We have been taunted and abused, and they have mocked you as well as us.

Yet we hold on to your promises in faith. We do not forget You, your people, or your covenant. We promise that by the strength of your Spirit we will remember and remain faithful, and you and your kingdom will forever be our highest joy.

Lord, we ask you to fulfill your promises. Rise up and strike down your enemies. Satan and his spiritual forces of darkness have persecuted your people, and they desire to frustrate your righteous rule over the universe. Fulfill your word to judge your enemies, to punish wickedness, and to establish righteousness.

Father, we recognize that our enemies are not other humans, but the spiritual forces who blind them to the light of Christ. We pray for You to open the eyes of those who do not know you, and to bind the power of the enemy who enslaves them. Spirit of the Living God, crush Satan and His demons, turn millions from darkness to light, and consummate your kingdom. In Jesus' name. Amen.